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## The Celtic Revival in Britain and Ireland: reconstructing the past

### Frances Fowle

In 1890 George Henry's and E.A. Hornel's *The Druids: Bringing in the Mistletoe* (FIG) was exhibited at the Grosvenor Gallery in London, where it caused a sensation. The art critic R.A.M. Stevenson described the druidical figures as 'grim, tawdry, and savage ... glowing with crude colour.'<sup>1</sup> Surrounded by a spectacular gold frame of interlaced snakes, the composition is painted in brilliant vermillion, emerald and gold, recalling the colour range of insular manuscripts. As if stepping out of the pages of Pliny, a solemn procession of Celtic priests emerges from a grove of oaks and descends a snow-clad hill. Henry and Hornel constructed a myth around the painting: it was said to have been inspired by the vision of a local shaman and the priests' features were based on close observation of druid skulls.<sup>2</sup> It certainly incorporates references to identifiable Celtic sources: a golden lunula-shaped sickle; a snake design inspired by Pictish stones; Celtic spirals loosely based on the Battersea Shiel; and pre-historic cup-and-ring markings linked to recent finds in the local Galloway landscape.<sup>3</sup> However the features of the central druid find their source not in druidical remains, but in photographs of Native Americans that were widely distributed around the time of Buffalo Bill's Wild West show, which performed at the Paris Exposition Universelle in 1889.

Like *The Druids*, the Celtic Revival was a Romantic reconstruction of Britain's ancient past. Based on the discoveries of archaeologists and antiquarians, linguists and social anthropologists, it was, at least initially, an attempt by artists to regain contact with their cultural roots and emulate a bygone age. As we shall see in this chapter, the re-interpretation of Celtic artefacts by painters and craftsman in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries was often based on error, ignorance and misconception, or motivated by political and nationalist agendas. Nevertheless, it was the assimilation of Celtic ornament that helped pave the way, at least in some areas of Britain, for the modernist era.

The rediscovery of Britain's 'primitive' origins was a focus for classical scholars and antiquarians from as early as the sixteenth century. Geoffrey of Monmouth's entirely unreliable twelfth-century *History of the Kings of Britain* – until then the accepted authority on the genealogy of the British nation – had established a glorious and noble ancestry, dating from the arrival of Brutus (after whom 'Britain' was named) in around 1240 BC. It also made some outrageous claims: that Belinus and Brennius had participated in the Sack of Rome (390 BC), for example, and that King Arthur had conquered Europe.

In 1582 the poet, playwright and classical scholar George Buchanan published the *Rerum Scotticarum Historia* in which he identified an entirely new set of pagan ancestors: the Britons, an ancient Belgic tribe; the Picts, who came from Germania; and the Celts.<sup>4</sup> Drawing on classical sources, as well as common roots in place names, Buchanan deduced that it was only the Scots and Irish who were descended

from the Celts - a tribe originating in an area around Lyons in France, known as *Gallia Celtica*, who travelled to Ireland and Scotland through Spain.<sup>5</sup>

William Camden's *Britannia*, published in Latin in 1586, further undermined Geoffrey's account. Drawing on Caesar's *Commentarii de Bello Gallico* (*Commentaries on the Gallic Wars*) (FIG) he asserted that the word 'Briton' derived not from 'Brutus' but from 'brith' or 'brit', meaning 'painted' – a reference to the blue painted men that Caesar had observed.<sup>6</sup> Camden's influential publication coincided with one of the earliest attempts to visualize the ancient people of Britain by the colonialist John White. White produced several likenesses of Picts and Ancient Britons (FIG), following a trip with Thomas Harriot to North America in 1585.<sup>7</sup> These included a nude *Pictish Woman and Warrior*, covered in blue woad, decorated with tattoos and armed with curved swords and spears; and a gruesome 'Pictish Warrior holding a human head', gaily painted with birds, animals and serpents.

Five engravings by Theodor de Bry – four closely related to White's illustrations and one, *The true picture of a young daughter of the Picts*, after Jacques le Moyne de Morgues - were included as a later supplement to Harriot's *A briefe and true report of the new found land of Virginia* (1588). The text noted that Pictish peoples occupied 'one part of Great Brittainne, which is now nammed England'.<sup>8</sup> The comparison with Native Americans was intended to underline the 'primitive' origins of the British people: 'to show how that the inhabitants of the Great Britannie hau bin in time past as sauage as those of Virginia'.<sup>9</sup>

Attempts to define the nation's ethnic origins continued into the seventeenth century: Samuel Bochart in his *Geographica Sacra* (1646) proposed that the first Britons were Phoenicians; and in 1676 Aylett Sammes, author of *Britannia Antiqua Illustrata* linked the Phoenicians to the Druids.<sup>10</sup> However the first published account of the Celts as the original inhabitants of the British isles did not appear until 1703 in Paul-Yves Pezron's 1703 *L'Antiquité de la Nation et la Langue des Celtes*. Translated in 1706 as *The Antiquities of Nations*, Pezron's research was hugely influential. However, whereas Pezron proposed that the Celtic language had left its mark on all European languages, the Welsh linguist and antiquarian Edward Lhuyd - in the first and only volume of his *Archaeologia Britannica* (1707) (FIG) - argued that the Celts were in fact a small tribe who had influenced only Brittany, Wales, Cornwall and the Gaelic parts of Ireland and Scotland. In time the label 'Celtic' came to describe the people of those areas (with the later addition of the Isle of Man), creating a racial cohesiveness and cultural identity that underpinned the Celtic revival of the Romantic era.

### **BARDS, DRUIDS and OSSIAN**

Although research into the origins of Britain's Celtic roots had been ongoing throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the Celtic revival in literature and the visual arts did not really gather pace until the mid-eighteenth century. The most significant figure of the first half of the century was the English antiquarian William Stukeley - known by his followers as 'the father of British Antiquities'.<sup>11</sup> Stukeley led the first investigations at Stonehenge and in 1721 drew the

archaeological remains at Avebury, (FIG) describing the site as a 'Celtic temple' and a place of druidical worship. Inspired by the work of his contemporary, the Irish-born philosopher and 'free-thinker' John Toland, Stukeley soon became fascinated by the Druids and attempted to revive some of their ancient ceremonies; he even painted a self-portrait in druid's robes and built a druidical folly in his garden.<sup>12</sup> In 1740 he published *Stonehenge: A Temple Restor'd to the British Druids* and three years later *Abury: A Temple of the British Druids, with Some Others ...*. The Druids' healing powers and mysterious rituals captured the Romantic imagination and numerous publications would follow, inspiring the first visualizations of these noble Celts.

In 1757 Thomas Gray published *The Bard. A Pindaric Ode*, regarded by many as the first creative work of the Celtic Revival.<sup>13</sup> The poem relates how the English king Edward I, who invaded Wales and put the bards to death, was challenged by a lone survivor, the last bard, who prophesied the king's downfall, before throwing himself to his death in the river Conway. The poem inspired numerous visual interpretations, not least Thomas Jones's 1774 oil painting *The Bard* (National Museums of Wales, Cardiff) (COMP) and Philip James de Loutherberg's *The Last Bard* (c.1784), known through numerous reproductions and copies. (FIG: Harrison after De Loutherberg, National Museums of Wales, Cardiff). Set in an ancient, remote landscape, a bard in druid's robes and long white beard stands on the edge of a cliff. He clutches his harp and turns to curse the invading troops of Edward I before leaping to his death.<sup>14</sup>

The bards were said to be descendants of the Druids; they provided access, through poetry and song, to our Celtic past. Their slaughter by Edward symbolized, on one level, the suppression of the imaginative faculties and, on another, the loss of the Celtic histories that constitute our British origins and provide the key to national identity. In the late eighteenth century, under the influence of antiquarians such as William Owen Pughe and Iolo Morganwyg (Edward Williams), the bard was adopted as a symbol of the Welsh nation. Pughe illustrated his personal copy of *The Heroic Elegies and other Pieces of Llywarch Hen* (1792) with a frontispiece depicting a Welsh bard creating the world.<sup>15</sup> He also arranged for the engraver Abraham Raimbach to illustrate Hu Gadarn, Iolo's mythical founder of the Welsh nation, stepping out of his coracle onto Welsh soil.<sup>16</sup>

An engraving of De Loutherberg's *The Last Bard* was reproduced as the frontispiece of Edward Jones's *Musical and Poetical Relicks of the Welsh Bards* in 1784. The print was widely disseminated and, before long, evolved into a druidic 'type'. Around 1797-8, for example, William Blake produced 116 illustrations for Thomas Gray's poem, including on the title page a druidic figure in long white beard, golden harp and flowing, star-studded robes (Yale Centre for British Art). When artists began to visualize James Macpherson's Ossian they, again, resorted to this bardic stereotype. MacPherson published his first 'Fragments' of poetry by the Celtic bard Ossian, supposedly translated from the original Gaelic, in 1760. These were followed by *Fingal* in 1761 and *Temora* in 1763.<sup>17</sup> The tales were gathered from mainly oral accounts and Macpherson was later exposed as a fraud, but the impact of the hugely popular poems was widespread.

The Danish artist Nikolai Abildgaard's beguiling oil painting of the *Blind Ossian singing his swan song* (1785, Statens Museum for Kunst, Copenhagen (FIG)) became the standard representation of Ossian as a white-haired, druidic bard clutching his harp. His lack of sight symbolized inner vision, a trope that dates back to earlier Celtic imagery. The image was widely disseminated through Johan Frederik Clemens's 1787 engraving (FIG) and became the frontispiece for numerous translations.

In Scotland Alexander Runciman was the first to bring the tales of Ossian to life, focusing on the Celtic hero Fingal.<sup>18</sup> In 1772-4 he was commissioned by Sir James Clerk to paint the staircase and grand saloon (later referred to as 'Ossian's Hall', now destroyed) at Penicuik House in Midlothian with scenes in a classical style. The suggestion that he should recreate the poems of Ossian appears to have come from Runciman himself, whose imagination extended to including two invented scenes: *Scandinavian Wizards saying their Incantations* and *Building of a Monument to the Poet*.<sup>19</sup> Runciman later produced three etched variations on one scene, taken from Macpherson's *Cathloda. The Finding of Conban-Cargla* (FIG 8) illustrates Fingal's chance discovery, in the Cave of Turthor, of the missing daughter of a tribal chieftain, imprisoned by the Scandinavian King Starno of Lochlin.

Runciman's imagination – as well as his style - was fuelled by the Swiss artist Henry Fuseli, whom he met in Italy around 1767. Fuseli was also a key, linking figure to Germany and Scandinavia<sup>20</sup> influencing artists such as Asmus Jacob Carstens's *Fingal's Battle with the Spirit of Loda* of around 1797 (Statens Museum for Kunst, Copenhagen), although Carstens's fascination for the epic poem was also undoubtedly fostered by his master Abildgaard. The Nordic references in the tales of Ossian held an immediate appeal for Danish artists: the principal setting for Fingal's tales was Inistore, or the Orkney islands, which, until 1465, were under Danish rule.<sup>21</sup>

In France, even before Napoleon was crowned Emperor, Ossian was used for overtly propaganda purposes. Napoleon Bonaparte was an Ossian enthusiast and is known to have carried a copy with him on his campaigns in Egypt and Syria (1798-1801).<sup>22</sup> In 1801 and 1802 the painters Baron Gérard and Anne-Louis Girodet completed two highly romanticized and theatrical Ossianic pieces for Josephine's Château at Malmaison, which Napoleon used as a retreat. Gérard's 1801 canvas *Ossian Evoking Ghosts with the Sound of his Harp on the Edge of the Lora* (Château de Malmaison) presents a wild, pagan Ossian, conjuring up the heroes of Celtic legend. Girodet's *Ossian Receiving the Ghosts of the French Heroes* of 1802 (Château de Malmaison (FIG)) is more overtly political. It shows a bearded, god-like Ossian welcoming recently fallen Napoleonic commanders to paradise, visualized as a curious fusion of Christian heaven and Nordic Valhalla. A radiant French cockerel on the right is held aloft, dominating the Austrian eagle on the left - an allusion to Napoleon's victory over Austria in 1800. This apparently 'Celtic' image is none other than blatant political propaganda, designed to encourage the French to get behind their leader.

## THE IRISH CELTIC REVIVAL: 'FINDS', COPIES AND CELTO-MANIA

With the dawn of the nineteenth century the Celtic revival spread to Ireland, ignited by a flurry of archaeological discoveries. These were carefully conserved and recorded for posterity through the painstaking work of individuals such as the artist George Petrie and the antiquarian and oculist Sir William Wilde, both of whom were on the committee of the Royal Irish Academy.<sup>23</sup> Petrie was responsible for the acquisition of important Irish manuscripts and significant examples of Insular metalwork, such as the Cross of Cong, now in the National Museum of Ireland. Wilde was a keen Celtic Revivalist and named his soon-to-be notorious son 'Oscar Fingal' after two Ossianic heroes. He produced a three-volume catalogue of the antiquities owned by the Academy, among which were recent discoveries of important insular metalwork, including the Ardagh Chalice and the Tara Brooch.

The discovery of the eighth-century Tara Brooch near Duntreath in 1850 opened the eyes of the Victorians to the beauty and sophisticated craftsmanship of Early Christian metalwork.<sup>24</sup> The *Art Journal* commented in 1853 that the Tara brooch had been 'made at a period when the Arts in Ireland had reached perfection'.<sup>25</sup> Its sheer scale eclipsed all earlier finds – and the Dublin jewellers G & S Waterhouse were quick to exploit the commercial potential of the object, which they acquired and copied.<sup>26</sup> They even named the original 'Tara' after the hill in County Meath where early High Kings held court.

This was the era of International Exhibitions and the brooch was shown at London's first Great Exhibition at the Crystal Palace in 1851, at the Dublin Exhibition of 1853 and the Paris Exposition Universelle of 1855, before being sold in 1868 to the Royal Irish Academy.<sup>27</sup> Smaller facsimiles and copies of the Tara brooch (FIG) and other recent 'finds' of Irish eighth-century brooches such as the 'Moor' brooch, the 'Kilmainham' or 'Knight Templar' brooch and the 'Arbutus berry' brooch (FIGS) were created by Waterhouse and acquired by the Museum of Manufactures (now the Victoria & Albert Museum) at the 1851 and 1853 exhibitions.

In 1853 Waterhouse produced a detailed catalogue, setting out his range of reproductions for the potential buyer. His commercial venture was considerably boosted by Queen Victoria, who had acquired a facsimile of the Tara brooch at the London International, triggering a fashion for such items. Victoria and Prince Albert had visited Trinity College, Dublin in 1849 and had admired the Book of Kells and the harp of Brian Boroimhe, as well as 'some ancient gold fibulae with silver and bronze brooches, the workmanship of which she particularly noticed'.<sup>28</sup> Prince Albert secretly acquired two brooches, one of which was a shawl pin, designed for Waterhouse by the goldsmith Edmond Johnson. Albert presented it to Victoria at Christmas, much to her delight. Now known as the Clarendon Brooch (FIG), it is a variant of the ninth-century Ogham Brooch, which was found in Ballyspellan, Co. Kerry in 1806. The original was engraved with Celtic interlace and set with silver beads, instead of the garnets that enrich the royal version.

Victoria's love of 'Celtic' brooches was well known and when she visited the Dublin exhibition in 1853 she was presented with the so-called Queen's Brooch (FIG), a copy by West & Son of the ninth-century Cavan brooch, discovered in Lough Ramor, County Cavan. Scottish items were also on display at the Dublin exhibition, including an annular brooch by William Acheson of Dublin (FIG), inspired by the Hunterston brooch. Typically these Scottish designs incorporated indigenous gemstones such as agate, while the Irish designs favoured bog oak and iron pyrites (also known as 'Irish diamonds').

Edmond Johnson was one of Waterhouse's favourite designers and his skill in reproducing insular objects was honed by his close association with the Royal Irish Academy.<sup>29</sup> As early as 1868 he was employed by the Academy to restore the Ardagh Chalice, one of the most important examples of insular craftsmanship. He went on to produce facsimiles of 'Celtic' objects, often restoring, rather than simply conserving the original artefacts. This tendency to 'improve' the original Insular material is a common feature in Celtic Revival design – but has the effect of destroying the mystery and associative qualities of the original. Taken out of context and seen as pure pattern, the stylized figures and animal forms lose their symbolic meaning.<sup>30</sup>

Johnson worked in partnership with Joseph Johnson Junior, who was either his brother or first cousin; for around thirty years, they controlled the leadership of the Company of Goldsmiths.<sup>31</sup> A good example of Joseph Johnson's skill at adapting Celtic craftsmanship to more modern purposes is a dish now in the National Museum of Ireland (FIG). Partly gilt, with insets of crystal, glass and enamel, the design is based on the foot of the Ardagh Chalice.

Johnson had direct access to the original object, but the majority of designers relied on illustrated catalogues or pattern books such as Owen Jones's highly influential *Grammar of Ornament* (1856), which included three pages of brightly coloured Celtic motifs, based on designs observed in sculpted crosses and insular manuscripts, isolated from their original context. (FIG) They were clearly categorised as examples of 'lapidary ornamentation', 'interlaced style' and 'spiral, diagonal, zoomorphic and later Anglo-Saxon ornaments'. An accompanying essay by John Obadiah Westwood outlined the sources of Celtic art and the 'peculiarities of celtic ornament'.

A more archaeological approach is evident in R.G. Latham's and A.W. Franks's *Horae Ferales or Studies in the archaeology of the Northern Nations* (1863) (FIG), which illustrated recent discoveries such as the Battersea Shield. Decorated with repoussé work, engraving, Celtic spirals and cloisonné enamel, the shield is one of the most significant pieces ever found in Britain. Indeed, it was referenced along with other finds nearly fifty years later by the Scottish artist John Duncan in his *Riders of the Sidhe* (FIG). One page of *Horae Ferales* shows four Iron Age terrets from separate hoards discovered during the first half of the nineteenth century - at Polden Hill, Somerset (1800), Alfriston, East Sussex (c.1830), Stanwick, North Yorkshire (1843) and Westall, Suffolk (1855) (FIGS), demonstrating the extent of the archaeological 'rediscovery' of Celtic Britain in the first half of the nineteenth century.

Westwood's *Facsimiles of the Miniatures & Ornaments of Anglo-Saxon and Irish Manuscripts* (1868, Ruskin Foundation, Lancaster) was another important source for designers in the late nineteenth century and, like the *Grammar of Ornament*, the reproductions were produced using chromo-lithography.<sup>32</sup> As early as 1843-5 Westwood had reproduced coloured illuminations from the Book of Kells in his *Palaeographia sacra pictoria: being a series of the ancient versions of the Bible*, 1843-45. Vivid colour is also a striking feature of Margaret Stokes's illustrations for Samuel Ferguson's *The Cromlech on Howth* (1861) (COMP), which was published in a plush green and gold cover decorated with Celtic interlace. The text was embellished by Stokes with knotwork designs and stylized forms, meticulously transcribed from the books of Kells and of Durrow.<sup>33</sup> The illuminations were coloured in reds and greens, far more vivid in tone than the originals.

Such brilliance is greatly at variance with the delicate faded tones of the manuscripts as they appear today. It may explain why vivid colour – and more importantly iridescence – is a feature of the work of later nineteenth-century revivalists such as Phoebe Traquair (who claimed to have been influenced by the Book of Kells) and John Duncan. Perhaps ironically, however, it was only once designers were able to be less perfectionist – and more inventive – in their approach that they were able to produce objects that retained the beauty and essence of the original.

## **CELTIC MODERNISM IN SCOTLAND**

The emphasis on skill and craftsmanship was an important aspect of the Celtic revival, especially in Scotland and Ireland.<sup>34</sup> One of the crafts to enjoy an upsurge in Ireland around the turn of the century was wood-carving, bringing about a revival of vernacular pieces such as Celtic settles, often decorated with Celtic knotwork and Irish mythological scenes (FIG). Irish craftsmen had a tendency to ignore Celtic design in favour of more clichéd symbols of Irish identity: in 1883 Dr William Sullivan, President of Queen's College, Cork, criticized the use in Irish decorative art of 'supposed national emblems' such as harps, round towers and shamrocks, praising instead the application of Celtic ornamentation.<sup>35</sup>

In his *Studies in Design* (1876) the (Scots-born) English designer Christopher Dresser touched only briefly on Celtic ornament, which he categorized as 'a class of grotesque', due to the stylization of natural forms: 'In some cases the neck of a bird, or the body of a beast is formed of strapwork; and two animals are not unfrequently twined together in a curious and intricate manner ... the whole composition is ornamental and not naturalistic, and the effect produced is highly humorous'.<sup>36</sup> This stylization of forms was what fascinated the most gifted 'Celtic' designers of the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries, some of whom were able to incorporate Celtic features in their work, while also responding to avant-garde styles and movements on the Continent.

The Honan Chapel (St Finn Barr) in Cork, with stained glass by Harry Clarke (1916) is surely the most outstanding example of Irish Celtic Revival craftsmanship. However, it perhaps lacks the subtlety of Mary Seton Tyler's innovative designs for the Watts



Memorial Chapel, Compton (1896) and Charles Rennie Mackintosh's radical experiments at Glasgow School of Art (1897-1909). Indeed it was among Scottish designers that Celtic modernism reached its apogee.<sup>37</sup>

In 1890s Scotland the Celtic Revival manifested itself as the Glasgow style, epitomised by the work of Mackintosh, Herbert McNair and Margaret and Frances Macdonald, known as 'The Four'. Among the most iconic images to emerge from this period were the Drooko Umbrella Poster, designed by Margaret and Frances Macdonald in 1895 and the Poster for the Glasgow Institute of Fine Arts (FIG, Hunterian Art Gallery), created jointly by McNair and the Macdonald sisters. The elongated figures and attenuated plant forms in both works derived from Medieval insular manuscripts and Celtic metalwork - as well as William Blake and perhaps even more esoteric sources such as Indian and Egyptian art. They caused tremendous consternation among the critics, who described the posters as 'spooky' and 'calculated to cause serious qualms of conscience to the nocturnal reveller'.<sup>38</sup>

For the Four, as for many Scottish artists of the avant-garde, the stylized forms of Celtic art provided a pathway to modernism. It represented an indigenous, national equivalent to the kind of 'primitive' sources that inspired European artists such as Paul Gauguin, whose radical 'synthetist' style derived from Japanese prints, popular Breton 'images d'Epinal' and stained glass. The Macdonald sisters work in a variety of media, finding inspiration in insular metal work, as well as working with gesso and glass beads - as in Margaret Macdonald's Celtic-inspired *The May Queen* 1900 (Kelvingrove Museum and Art Gallery, Glasgow (COMP)). They also injected humour into their work: Frances Macdonald's design for the music programme for the Glasgow School of Art Club 'At Home' on 25 November 1893 (FIG) shows two women curled under an apple tree in a brilliant design that recalls the attenuated hybrid figures in the Book of Kells, as well as the formal elements of medieval penannular brooches.<sup>39</sup>

The Macdonald sisters attended Glasgow School of art, overseen by the charismatic Fra Newbery and his wife Jessie, who taught embroidery. Under Jessie Newbery and her successor Ann Macbeth the Glasgow Style flourished, producing a generation of highly talented women designers such as Frances Mary Templeton, a pupil of Macbeth.<sup>40</sup> The design of a sideboard runner, executed by Templeton in 1909 (FIG) clearly derives from penannular brooch designs, as well the 'dice' pattern evident in Medieval Manuscripts such as the Book of Durrow. Another advocate of Celtic art and the Glasgow style, Margaret Gilmour, established a studio in West George Street, Glasgow, where she taught a variety of crafts, including metal work and enamelling (FIG).

In Edinburgh the Celtic Revival flowered under the inspirational leadership of the biologist and utopian visionary Patrick Geddes. Geddes's socialist leanings inspired him to support the Edinburgh Social Union, whose programme of urban renewal resulted in the outstanding murals devised by Phoebe Traquair for the Sick Children's Mortuary Chapel, St Mary's Cathedral Song School and the Catholic Apostolic Church in Mansefield Place, Edinburgh.<sup>41</sup> As early as 1885, stimulated by

insular enamel work and medieval manuscripts, Traquair employed brilliant colour and gold leaf as well as foliated initials in her studies for the mortuary chapel scheme (FIG), which explores the theme of the journey of the soul to heaven. In 1889 the art historian Gerard Baldwin Brown described the murals as a piece of 'illumination enlarged'.<sup>42</sup>

Geddes commissioned male and female artist-designers to paint decorative mural schemes, invited artists and scientists to his annual 'summer schools' in Edinburgh and encouraged Scottish and French writers and artists to contribute to his artistic journal, *The Evergreen: a Northern Seasonal*, published in four volumes 1895-6.<sup>43</sup> The journal included Celtic-inspired illustrations and head and tailpieces, probably based on sources such as J. Romilly Allen's pamphlet *Notes on Celtic Ornament* (1885).<sup>44</sup> The *Evergreen* also included translations from Breton and Irish legend and the poetry and writings of Fiona Macleod, the Celtic alter ego of the writer William Sharp. Geddes contributed an essay entitled 'The Celtic Renaissance', a plea for cultural creativity and national revival, underscored by more than a touch of social utopianism.

Among the most striking images in the first edition of the Journal (the Book of Spring) is John Duncan's *Anima Celtica* (FIG) which celebrates cultural revival and the creativity of the Celtic (specifically female, instinctive) imagination. A woman embodying the 'Celtic Mind' has conjured up ancient Gaelic tales on regenerative themes, such as the 'Birth of Ossian' and the 'Awakening of Cuchulain'.<sup>45</sup> Spirals and interlace emerge from an incense burner, diving each scene, and the illustration is punctuated by a variety of supposedly 'Celtic' objects: an iron age sword, a highland dirk and a penannular brooch.<sup>46</sup> A closely related oil painting by Duncan (National Trust for Scotland) includes a different selection of scenes from Irish mythology, including Deirdre of the Sorrows and the Children of Lir, painted in a style that owes much to the French symbolist Pierre Puvis de Chavannes, whose work Duncan had admired in Paris.<sup>47</sup>

Geddes's friend the painter Charles Mackie designed the cover for the *Evergreen* with a Celtic 'Tree of Life' motif, symbolizing creative evolution, revival and interconnectedness. The Tree of Life soon became a *leitmotif* of the Scottish Celtic Revival: Traquair created a stylized tree of life on the embossed wing panels of her *Motherhood* triptych of 1901 (FIG.), which was further decorated with enamel, jasper, lapis lazuli and two moonstones; and in 1906 Alexander Fisher produced a Tree of Life 'Morse' (Victoria & Albert Museum, London) in gold, emerald and enamel. Certain aspects of Fisher's work are comparable to Traquair, who was taught by one of his pupils, Lady Carmichael. Like Traquair he created beautifully designed objects inset with brilliant coloured enamels, such as his *Triptych in the Form of a Celtic Shrine* c.1903 (FIG).

The Manx designer Archibald Knox (of Scottish parentage), too, incorporated tree of life motifs into some of his designs for Liberty's in London.<sup>48</sup> From around 1898 he produced designs for Liberty's 'Cymric' range of silver ('Cymric from Cymru, the ancient name for Wales), along with Jessie M. King, Oliver Baker, Kate Harris and

Arthur Silver. His designs included 'runic' clasps, chalices, bowls, tea sets (FIG), and the occasional vase (FIG), often decorated with coloured enamels and stones. His 'Tudric' range clocks were inspired by the carved stone crosses on the Isle of Man and his jewellery designs often incorporated Celtic interlace, but in general his highly abstracted designs make only subtle reference to the Celtic ornament that inspired them. Some of the titles of his early designs for bowls c.1900 point to his Manx origins: the 'Fergus' (a thirteenth-century Isle of Man king), for example, and the 'Somerled', named after a mid-twelfth-century warlord of Norse-Gaelic origin who ruled the Kingdom of the Isles, including the Isle of Man, the Scottish Hebrides, and the islands of the Firth of Clyde.<sup>49</sup>

## CELTIC HEROES AND BRITISH NATIONALISM

Knox was a first cousin of Alexander Carmichael, author of the *Carmina Gadelica* (1900), a compendium of Gaelic prayers, hymns and poetry, amassed over forty years. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries translations and versions of Celtic poetry and mythology by the likes of Lady Charlotte Guest (*The Mabinogion*) in Wales, Marie Henri d'Arbois de Jubainville (*Introduction to the study of Celtic Literature*, 1883) in France, W.B. Yeats (*The Celtic Twilight* 1893) and Lady Gregory (*Gods and Fighting Men* 1904) in Ireland, and Fiona Macleod (*Lyra Celtica* 1896) in Scotland gave inspiration to artists such as John Duncan, who produced a whole series of paintings inspired by Celtic mythology in the period leading up to the first world war. Among the most striking of these is his *Tristan and Iseult* (1912) (FIG), in which the Cornish knight Tristan and the Irish princess Iseult prepare to drink the love potion which will cause their downfall.

The proliferation of Celtic literature resulted from a wave of nationalism that swept over Britain in the late nineteenth century. It stemmed from a desire to preserve ancient customs and language and to protect vernacular crafts, poetry and music from the homogenising effect of English culture. In Wales the medieval festival of music and poetry known as Eisteddfod was revived as early as 1792 by Iolo Morganwg. The unlikely setting for the revival of the ancient ceremony (known as the Gorsedd) was Primrose Hill in London, where a group of Welsh bards gathered at the autumn equinox. The Welsh Gorsedd became a regular event and similar ceremonies were held in Cornwall and Brittany, but it was not until 1858 that John Williams ab Ithel held the first 'national' Eisteddfod at Llangollen, complete with music, poetry and dance. A number of Celtic revival objects were produced in association with the Eisteddfod (FIG) and the sculptor William Goscombe John modelled the medals which were awarded as prizes. A keen supporter of the annual event was the artist Hubert von Herkomer who, in 1896, depicted the Arch-druid of Wales Hwfa Mon in full regalia (FIG).

Nationalism was also celebrated through depictions of patriotic 'Celtic' heroes such as Tewdric Mawr, Cuchulainn or Caractacus. The Welsh king Tewdric Mawr was ruler of Gwent and Morgannwg. In 610AD he successfully defended his realm against the invading Saxons, but was mortally wounded. John Evan Thomas's *Death of Tewdric*

*Mawr* (FIG), the original plaster for which was shown at the Abergavenny Eisteddfod in 1848, shows the warrior in his dying moments, comforted by his daughter Marchell, while an ancient bard sings and plays his harp.

The equivalent in Irish visual culture is Oliver Sheppard's moving bronze *The Dying Cúchulain* (1911, GPO, Dublin), which shows the mythical Irish hero, fatally wounded in battle and bound to the Clochafarmore Stone, like Christ on the cross. On his shoulder sits Morrígan, the Celtic goddess of war, awaiting the moment that his life is finally extinguished. This image of the dying Cúchulain became a metaphor for the resolve of the Irish people, desirous of independence from the British.

Cúchulain was also adopted by Geddes's circle in Edinburgh as a more universal, pan-Celtic hero and a symbol of cultural renaissance. Duncan depicted *The Awakening of Cúchulain* both in the *Evergreen* and in his mural scheme for Ramsay Lodge; and in a drawing now in the Scottish National Gallery (FIG) this Ossianic figure appears fearless and strong, his chiseled features and interlaced hair seemingly carved from Pictish stone.

English Iron Age heroes such as Caractacus (or Caradog), King of the Trinovantes, and Boudica, Queen of the Iceni, also enjoyed a revival, especially during the Victorian period. Such figures allowed artists to promote British imperialism through a historical re-imagining of the nation's patriotic past, since, in their different ways, they symbolised the bravery and tenacity of the British people and their determination to protect their native land against foreign (Roman) invasion.

Caractacus was son of the Catavallaunian King Cunobelinus. He ruled over a large part of southern Britain and from 43-47AD led the local resistance against the Roman general Aulus Plautius. He was eventually forced to withdraw into south Wales, from where, according to Tacitus, he led the Silures and Ordovices against Ostorius Scapula. In 50AD he was defeated and fled north, only to be handed over to the Romans by Cartimandua, Queen of the Brigantes. In Rome he was sentenced to death, but persuaded the Emperor Claudius to spare his life. Caractacus's speech to Claudius was a popular subject in eighteenth-century art, painted by Fuseli and Blake and captured in numerous prints. In the Victorian period Caractacus was regarded increasingly as an inspirational figure, symbolising national loyalty and patriotism: in 1862 a horse named Caractacus was winner of the Epsom Derby; and in 1898 Sir Edward Elgar composed his uplifting *Caractacus* cantata.

The most characteristic nineteenth-century image of the Iron Age hero was by the Irish sculptor John Henry Foley, who later sculpted Prince Albert for the Albert Memorial in London. In 1851 he was commissioned by the Corporation of London to produce sculptures of Caractacus and Egeria for the Egyptian Sculpture Hall at the Mansion House.<sup>50</sup> In the finished work (FIG: Guildhall Library and Art Gallery), Caractacus stands with legs astride and his left arm raised aloft, in a defiant gesture of command, while his right hand grasps his battle axe and his shield rests by his side.

With Victoria on the throne, Boudica also enjoyed a revival and was used to boost imperial domination and to encourage loyalty to the monarchy.<sup>51</sup> Boudica was Queen of the Iceni, a British tribe who lived in the area that now covers Norfolk, parts of Suffolk and Cambridgeshire. She successfully led a revolt against the Romans, taking over Colchester, London and St Albans, until she was finally defeated by Caius Suetonius Paullinus and probably took her own life.

'Boudica' was said to mean 'victory', creating a symbolic semantic link between Queen Victoria and the 'warrior queen'. Among the earliest visual images of was Henry Courtney Selous's *Boudica Harangued by the Iceni* of 1843 (current whereabouts unknown), a cartoon for the competition to decorate Westminster Hall. The English sculptor Thomas Thorneycroft – who had created a larger than life-size equestrian statue of Victoria for the 1851 International Exhibition – was later commissioned by Prince Albert to create a monumental bronze *Boadicea and her Daughters*. The finished piece was inspired by lines from Tacitus, and also by Tennyson's 1864 poem *Boadicea*, in which the Icenian queen stands 'loftily charioted ... maddening all that heard her in her fierce volubility'. The ambitious bronze sculpture, which now stands on the Thames Embankment, was only cast in 1902, a year after Victoria's death. It features Boudica standing tall, brandishing her spear and driving a chariot, complete with rearing horses, and remains to this day an enduring example of British imperial propaganda.

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<sup>1</sup> *The Saturday Review*, 10 May, 1890, p.565, cited in Smith 1997, p.60.

<sup>2</sup> Hartrick 1939, p.59 and Robert Macaulay Stevenson's notes, cited in Smith 1997, p.59.

<sup>3</sup> John Morrison suggests other sources such as The Aylesford Bucket (British Museum) and the Dunnichen stone in Angus. See John Morrison 'Nationalism and nationhood: late-nineteenth-century painting in Scotland in Facos and Hirsh (eds), 2003, pp.199-200; and Morrison 2003, pp.192-7. See also Billcliffe 2010, pp.68-70.

<sup>4</sup> Collis 2010, p.40.

<sup>5</sup> Morse 2005, p.16.

<sup>6</sup> Camden 1610, p.26; Morse 2005, p.17.

<sup>7</sup> See S. Smiles, 'John White and British antiquity: savage origins in the context of Tudor historiography' in Sloan 2007, pp.106-12.

<sup>8</sup> Smiles 2007, p.108.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Morse 2005, pp.17-18; Hutton 2011, p.69.

<sup>11</sup> On Stukeley, see Haycock 2002.

<sup>12</sup> Morse 2005, p.77; Hutton 2011, p.vi. The portrait is in Bristol University Library, special collections.

<sup>13</sup> On Gray's poem and related works of art, see McCarthy 1965.

<sup>14</sup> On the Welsh bard in visual culture, see Fairclough, Gwilt and Lile 2001.

<sup>15</sup> Lord 2000, p.247.

<sup>16</sup> Lord 2000, p.248.

<sup>17</sup> A revised version of the texts appeared in 1773.

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- <sup>18</sup> On Runciman and Ossian, see Macmillan 1986, Chapter IV ('An Ossian's fancy and a Fingal's fire'), pp.42-62.
- <sup>19</sup> Macmillan 1986, p.55.
- <sup>20</sup> Murdo Macdonald, 'Ossian and Art: Scotland into Europe via Rome' in Gaskill 2002, p.401.
- <sup>21</sup> Hugh Blair, writing in 1875, observed of the Orcadians: 'Their ancient language ... is called the Norse; and is a dialect not of the Celtic, but of the Scandinavian tongue'. Hugh Blair, 'A Critical Dissertation on the Poems of Ossian, the Son of Fingal' in Macpherson 1795, vol.2, p.324.
- <sup>22</sup> Healey 1959, p.127.
- <sup>23</sup> For a comprehensive discussion of the Celtic Revival in Ireland see Sheehy 1980.
- <sup>24</sup> 'The Celtic Revival and Irish national identity' in Gere and Rudoe 2010, pp.444-453.
- <sup>25</sup> *Art Journal* 1853, p.39, cited in Gere and Rudoe 2010, p.444.
- <sup>26</sup> On this see further McCrum 1993.
- <sup>27</sup> Gere and Rudoe 2010, p.444.
- <sup>28</sup> *The Times*, 9 August 1849, p.4, cited in Gere and Rudoe 2010, p.446.
- <sup>29</sup> On Johnson see Cheryl Washer, 'The Work of Edmond Johnson: Archaeology and Commerce' in Edelstein 1992, pp.106-121.
- <sup>30</sup> On this see Michael Camille, 'Domesticating the Dragon: The Rediscovery, Reproduction and Re-invention of Early Irish Metalwork' in Edelstein 1992, p.6.
- <sup>31</sup> Cheryl Washer, 'The Work of Edmond Johnson: Archaeology and Commerce' in Edelstein 1992, p.110.
- <sup>32</sup> On the development of chromolithography and its impact, see Edelstein 1992, p.123.
- <sup>33</sup> Sheehy 1980, pp.24-5. By the late 1880s and 1890s Celtic revivalists could also refer to Margaret Stokes's detailed illustrations for *Early Christian Art in Ireland* (1887), which reproduced key insular objects such as St Patrick's Bell Shrine in intricate detail.
- <sup>34</sup> On the Arts and Crafts movement in Ireland and Scotland see Larmour 1992; Bowe and Cumming 1998; Cumming 2007; Carruthers 2013.
- <sup>35</sup> *Cork Industrial Exhibition 1883. Report*, Cork 1886, p.264, cited in Larmour 1992, p.4.
- <sup>36</sup> Dresser 1876, p.33.
- <sup>37</sup> In the 1920s and 30s Alexander Ritchie on the island of Iona and George Bain were among those who continued to be inspired by Celtic design.
- <sup>38</sup> *Glasgow Evening News*, 4 February 1895, p.2, cited in Helland 1996, p.60.
- <sup>39</sup> The stylistic influence of symbolist artists such as Jan Toorop, Carlos Schwabe and Aubrey Beardsley has also been observed. See, for example, Robertson 2006, p.34.
- <sup>40</sup> On the Glasgow School and women designers see Burkhauser 2001.
- <sup>41</sup> The main authority on Traquair is Cumming 1993 and Cumming 2006.
- <sup>42</sup> Gerard Baldwin Brown, *The Scottish Art Review*, January 1889, cited in Cumming 1993, p.13.
- <sup>43</sup> On Geddes's artistic circle and contacts with France, see Fowle and Thomson 2004. See also Elizabeth Cumming, 'A Gleam of Renaissance Hope': Edinburgh at the turn of the century' in Kaplan 1990, pp.149-61.

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<sup>44</sup> J. Romilly Allen, *Notes on Celtic Ornament: The key and spiral patterns* (Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland) 1885. Classes in Celtic Ornament were also held at Edinburgh School of Art.

<sup>45</sup> The woman was modeled by Ella Carmichael, whose father, Alexander Carmichael, edited *Carmina Gadelica*.

<sup>46</sup> On this image see Murdo Macdonald, 'Anima Celtica: embodying the soul of the nation in 1890s Edinburgh' in Cusack and Bhreathnach-Lynch 2003, pp.1-10.

<sup>47</sup> On Puvis de Chavannes and other French sources for John Duncan, see F. Fowle, 'The Franco-Scottish Alliance: Artistic Links between Scotland and France in the late 1880s and 1890s' in Fowle and Thomson 2004, pp.37-44.

<sup>48</sup> On Knox see most recently O'Neill 2014.

<sup>49</sup> Anthony Bernbaum, 'Origins of the Liberty Cymric silver range' in O'Neill 2014, p.37.

<sup>50</sup> See *Catalogue of the Sculpture, Paintings, Engravings and Other Works of Art belonging to the Corporation, together with the Books not included in the Catalogue of the Guildhall Library. Part the First*. Printed for the use of the members of the Corporation of London, London 1867, pp.43-7.

<sup>51</sup> Aldhouse-Green 2006; Hagerman 2013.